

A SERIOUS CONTRAST.

DOCTRINE OF THE BIBLE.

1. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul."—Gen. 2: 7.
2. "For dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return."—Gen. 3: 19.
3. "For the wages of sin is death."—Rom. 6: 23.
4. "Sin when finished brings forth death."—James 1: 15.
5. "For in the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."—Gen. 2: 17.
6. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."—Ezek. 18: 4, 20.
7. "The dead praise not the Lord."—Psa. 115: 17.
8. "The dead know not anything."—Eccl. 9: 5.
9. "This is the second death."—Rev. 20: 14, 15.
10. "But he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."—Mat. 3: 12.
11. "But the wicked shall perish."—Psa. 37: 20.
12. "All the wicked will God destroy."—Psa. 145: 20.
13. "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, *heard I saying*, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever."—Rev. 5: 13.

Thus do men "make the word of God of none effect through their traditions," and "have caused many to stumble at the law." Mark 7: 13. Mal. 2: 8.

DOCTRINE OF CHURCHES.

1. And the Lord God formed man of dust and spirit, and breathed into his nostrils an immortal soul, and man became a mortal-body-man, and an immortal-soul-man.
2. For dust and spirit thou art and unto dust and spirit shalt thou return
3. The wages of sin is separating the soul-man from the body-man.
4. Sin, when finished, brings forth sin: (spiritual death, or dead in sin.)
5. For in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt not surely die, but sin (die spiritually.)
6. The soul that sinneth it shall live a sinner, (die spiritually.)
7. The dead praise the Lord but not as the living do.
8. The dead know more than all the living.
9. This is the second time dead in sin.)
10. But he will not burn the chaff up, but burn it forever.
11. But the wicked shall not perish, but live forever in misery.
12. None of the wicked will God destroy, but will burn them forever.
13. *I heard* by far the largest part of the human family, which are under the earth, in a place I call hell, *cursing* Him that sitteth upon the throne and the Lamb forever and ever.

LETTER OF REV. JOHN FOSTER

ON FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

Rev. J. Foster was a Baptist minister of England, who, for over forty years rejected the doctrine of endless misery, yet remained in good standing in that denomination, and died in 1843. He was universally admitted, and this letter shows him, to be a profound thinker and powerful reasoner. He was not decided whether the wicked will be annihilated, or finally restored.

Some few sentences, having no *particular* bearing upon the subject, have been omitted for want of room.

[This letter is thus published in a tract form, by J. BLAIN, Baptist minister, of Buffalo, N. Y., author of "DEATH NOT LIFE: or the DESTRUCTION of the Wicked (often called Annihilation) ESTABLISHED, and the Doctrine of *Endless Misery Disproved*.—To which is added a Review of Dr. E. Beecher's CONFLICT of AGES." One hundred and sixty pages. Price twenty-five cents, at retail. Postage four cents. Several other valuable works on this doctrine may be had of him, at No. 19 North Division Street, Buffalo.

September 24th, 1841.

DEAR SIR:—If you could have been apprized how much less research I have made into what has been written on the subject of your letter than you appear to have done, you would have had little expectation of assistance in deciding your judgment. I have, perhaps, been too content to let an opinion (or impression) admitted in early life dispense with protracted inquiry and various reading. The general, not very far short of universal, judgment of divines, in affirmation of the doctrine of eternal punishment, must be acknowledged a weighty consideration. It is a very fair question, Is it likely that so many thousands of able, learned, benevolent, and pious men should all have been in error? And the language of Scripture is formidably strong,* so strong that it must be an argument of extreme cogency that would authorize a limited interpretation.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge myself *not* convinced of the Orthodox doctrine. If asked *why* not, I should have little to say in the way of criticism, of implications found or sought in what may be called incidental expressions of Scripture, or of the passages dubiously cited in favor of final, universal restitution. It is the MORAL ARGUMENT, as it may be named, that *presses irresistably on my mind*,—that which comes in the STUPENDOUS IDEA OF ETERNITY.

It appears to me that the teachers and believers of the Orthodox doctrine hardly ever make an earnest, strenuous effort to form a conception of eternity; or, rather, a conception somewhat of the

*This expression could not have been made by Foster, had he not taken for granted the immortality of the wicked. On this supposition he (with others) applied about two hundred texts for their *destruction*, as threatenings of endless life in misery,—a serious error.—J. BLAIN.

nature of a faint incipient approximation. Because it is confessedly beyond the compass of thought, it is suffered to go without an attempt at thinking of it. They utter the term in the easy currency of language, have a vague and transitory idea of something obscurely vast, and do not labor to place and detain the mind in intense protracted contemplation, seeking all expedients for expanding and aggravating the awful import of such a word. Though every mode of illustration is feeble and impotent, one would surely think there would be an insuppressible impulse to send forth the thoughts to the utmost possible reach into the immensity, when it is *an immensity into which our own most essential interests are infinitely extended*. Truly it is very strange, that even religious minds can keep so quietly aloof from the amazing, the overwhelming contemplation of what they have the destiny and the near prospect of entering upon.

Expedients of illustration of what eternity is *not*, supply the best attainable means of assisting remotely towards a glimmering apprehension of what it is. All that is within human capacity is to imagine the vastest measures of *time*, and to look to the termination of these as only touching the commencement of eternity.

For example: it has been suggested to imagine the number of particles, atoms, contained in this globe, and suppose them one by one annihilated, each in a thousand years, till all were gone; but just as well say, a million, or a million of millions, of years or ages,—it is all the same as against infinite duration.

Extend the thought of such a process to our whole mundane system, and finally to the whole material universe; it is still the same. Or, imagine a series of numerical figures, in close order, extending to a line of such a length that it would encircle the globe, like the equator,—or that would run along with the earth's orbit round the sun, or with the outermost planet, Uranus,—or that it would draw a circle of which the radius should be from the earth or sun to Sirius,—or that should encompass the entire material universe, which, as being material, can not be infinite. The most stupendous of these measures of *time* would have an end; and would, when completed, be still *nothing to eternity*.

Now think of an infliction of misery protracted through such a period, and at the end of it being only *commencing*,—not one smallest step nearer a conclusion,—the case just the same if that sum of figures were multiplied by itself. And then think of *man*,—his nature, his situation, the circumstances of his brief sojourn and trial on earth. Far be it from us to make light of the demerit of sin, and to remonstrate with the supreme Judge against a severe chastisement, of whatever moral nature we may regard the infliction to be. But still, what is man? He comes into the world with a nature fatally corrupt, and powerfully tending to actual evil. He comes among a crowd of temptations adapted to his innate evil propensities. He grows up (incomparably the greater portion of the race) in great ignorance, his judgment weak, and under numberless beguilements into error; while his passions and appetites are strong, his conscience unequally matched against their power,—in the majority of

men, but feebly and rudely constituted. The influence of whatever good instruction he may receive is counteracted by a combination of opposite influences almost constantly acting on him. He is essentially and inevitably unapt to be powerfully acted on by what is invisible and future. In addition to all which, there is the intervention and activity of the great tempter and destroyer. In short, his condition is such that there is no hope of him, but from a direct, special operation on him of what we denominate grace. *Is it not so? are we not convinced? is it not the plain doctrine of Scripture? is there not irresistible evidence, from a view of the actual condition of the human world, that no man can become good, in the Christian sense,—can become fit for a holy and happy place hereafter,—but by this operation *ab extra*?* But this is arbitrary and discriminative on the part of the sovereign Agent, and independent of the will of man. And how awfully evident is it, that this indispensable operation takes place only on a comparatively small proportion of the collective race!

Now, this creature, thus constituted and circumstanced, passes a few fleeting years on earth, a short, sinful course, in which he does often what, notwithstanding his ignorance and ill-disciplined judgment and conscience, he knows to be wrong, and neglects what he knows to be his duty; and, consequently, for a greater or less measure of guilt, widely different in different offenders, deserves punishment. But *ENDLESS PUNISHMENT! HOPELESS MISERY, through a duration to which the terms *above* imagined will be absolutely NOTHING!* I acknowledge my inability (I would say it reverently) to admit this belief, together with a belief in the *Divine goodness*,—the belief that “God is love,” that His tender mercies are over all His works. Goodness, benevolence, charity, as ascribed to Him, can not mean a quality foreign to all human conception of goodness; it must be something analogous in principle to what Himself has defined and required as goodness in His moral creatures, that, in adoring the Divine goodness, we may not be worshipping an “unknown God.” But, if so, how would all our ideas be confounded, while contemplating Him bringing, of His own sovereign will, a race of creatures into existence, in such a condition that they certainly will and must—*must* by their nature and circumstances—go wrong, and be miserable, unless prevented by especial grace, which is the privilege of only a small proportion of them, and at the same time affixing on their delinquency a doom of which it is infinitely beyond the highest archangel's faculty to apprehend a thousandth part of the horror!

It must be in deep humility that we venture to apply to the measures of the Divine government the rules indispensable to the equity of human administration. Yet we may advert to the principle in human legislation, that the man tempted to crime should, as far as it is possible without actual experience, be apprized of the nature and measure of the penal consequence. It should be something, the main force of which can be placed in intelligible *opposition*, so to speak, to the temptation. If it be something totally out of his faculties to apprehend, to realize to his mind, that *threatened something* ~~is~~ *unknown*, has not its appropriate fitness to deter him. There is, or

may be, in it what would be of mighty force to deter him, *if he could have a competent notion of it*; but his necessary ignorance precludes from him that salutary force. Is he not thus taken at a fearful disadvantage? As a motive to deter him, the threatened penalty can only be in the proportion to his (in the present case) narrow faculty of apprehending it; but, as an evil to be suffered, it surpasses, in magnitude, every intellect but the Omniscient. Might we not imagine the reflection of one of the condemned delinquents, suffering on, and still interminably on, through a thousand or a million of ages. to be expressed in some such manner as this?—"O, if it had been possible for me to conceive but the most diminutive part of the weight and horror of this doom, every temptation to sin would have been enough to strike me dead with terror; I should have shrunk from it with the most violent recoil."

A common argument has been that sin is an *infinite evil*, that is, of infinite demerit, as an offence against an infinite Being; and that, since a finite creature can not suffer infinitely *in measure*, he must *in duration*. But surely, in all reason, the limited, and in the present instance *diminutive*, nature of the criminal must be an essential part of the case for judgment. Every act must, for one of its proportions, be measured by the nature of the agent. And it would seem that one principle in that rule of proportion should be, that the offending agent should be capable of being aware of the magnitude (the *amount*, if we might use such a word,) of the offence he commits, by being capable of something like an adequate conception of the Being against whom it is committed. A perverse child, committing an offence against a great monarch, of whose dignity it *had some*, but a vastly inadequate, apprehension, would not be punished in the same manner as an offender of high endowments and responsibility, and fully aware of the dignity of the personage offended. The one would justly be chastised; the other might as justly be condemned to death. In the present case, the offender does or may know that the Being offended against is of awful majesty, and, therefore, the offence is one of great aggravation, and he will justly be punished with great severity; but, by his extremely contracted and feeble faculties, as the lowest in the scale of strictly rational and accountable creatures in the whole creation, he is *infinitely incapable* of any adequate conception of the greatness of the Being offended against. He is, then, according to the argument, obnoxious to a punishment not in any proportion to his own nature, but alone to that infinity of the supreme nature, which is to him infinitely inconceivable and unknown.

If an evil act of a human being may be of infinite demerit, why may not a good one be of infinite excellence or merit, as having also a reference to the infinite Being? Is it not plain, that every act of a finite nature must have, in all senses, the *finite quality of that nature*, and can not, therefore, be of infinite demerit?

Can we,—I would say with reverence,—can we realize it as possible that a lost soul, after countless millions of ages, and in prospect of an interminable successions of such enormous periods, can be made to have the conviction, absolute and perfect, that *all this is a*

just, an equitable infliction, and from a Power as good as He is just, for a few short, sinful years on earth?

Yes, those twenty, forty, seventy years, growing up to infinity of horror in the review, in proportion to the distance which the condemned spirit recedes from them—all eternity not sufficing to reveal fully what those years contained!—*MILLIONS OF AGES for each single evil thought or word!*

But it is usually alleged, that there will be an *endless continuance* of sinning, with probably an endless aggravation, and, therefore, the punishment must be endless. Is not this like an admission of disproportion between the punishment and the *original cause* of its infliction? But, suppose the case to be so,—that is to say, that the punishment is not a retribution *simply* for the guilt of the momentary existence on earth, but a continued punishment of the continued, ever aggravated guilt in the eternal state; the allegation is of no avail in vindication of the doctrine, because the first consignment to the dreadful state *necessitates a continuance of the criminality*; the doctrine teaching that it is of the essence, and is an awful aggravation, of the original consignment,—that it dooms the condemned to maintain the criminal spirit, unchanged, for ever. The doom to *sin* as well as to suffer, and, according to the argument, to sin *in order* to suffer, is inflicted as the punishment of the sin committed in the mortal state. Virtually, therefore, the eternal punishment is the punishment of the sins of time.

Under the light (or the *darkness*) of this doctrine, *how inconceivably mysterious and awful is the aspect of the whole economy of this human world!* The immensely greater number of the race hitherto, through all ages and regions, passing a short life under no illuminating, transforming influence of their Creator; ninety-nine in a hundred of them, perhaps, having never received any authenticated message from heaven; passing off the world in a state unfit for a spiritual, heavenly and happy kingdom elsewhere; and all destined to everlasting misery! The thoughtful spirit has a question silently suggested to it, of far more emphatic import than that of him who exclaimed, "Hast Thou made all men *in vain*?"

Even in the dispensation of redemption by the Mediator, the only light that shines through this dark economy, how profoundly mysterious is its slow progress, as yet, in its uncorrupted purity and saving efficacy! What proportion of the earth's inhabitants are, at this hour, the subjects of its vital agency? It was not the Divine volition that the success should be greater,—that a greater number should be saved by it,—or, most certainly, most necessarily, its efficacy *would* have been greater. But in thus withholding from so large a proportion of mankind even the knowledge, and from so vast a majority in the nominally Christian nations the Divine application, indispensable to the efficacy of the Christian dispensation, *could it be that the Divine purpose was to consign so many of His creatures, existing under such fearful circumstances, to the doom of eternal misery?* Does the belief consist, with any conception we can form, of infinite goodness combined with infinite power?

But after all this, we have to meet the grave question, *What say the*

Scriptures? There is a force in their expressions at which we well may tremble. On *no* allowable interpretation do they signify less than a very protracted duration and formidable severity. But I hope it is not presumptuous to take advantage of the fact, that the terms *everlasting, eternal, forever*, original or translated, are often employed in the Bible, as well as other writings, under great and various limitations of import, and are thus withdrawn from the predicament of *necessarily and absolutely* meaning a strictly endless duration. The limitation is often, indeed, plainly marked by the nature of the subject. In other instances the words are used with a figurative indefiniteness, which leaves the limitation to be made by some general rule of reason and proportion. They are designed to magnify, to aggravate, rather than to define. My resource in the present case, then, is simply this: that since the terms do not necessarily and absolutely signify an interminable duration, and since there is in the present instance to be pleaded, for admitting a limited interpretation, *a reason in the moral estimate of things, of STUPENDOUS, of INFINITE urgency, involving our conceptions of the Divine goodness and equity, and leaving those conceptions overwhelmed in darkness and horror if it be rejected*, I therefore conclude that a limited interpretation is authorized.

If it be asked, *How could the doctrine have been more plainly and positively asserted than it is in the Scripture language?* In answer, I ask, How do we construct our words and sentences to express it in an absolute manner, so as to leave no *possibility* of understanding the language in a different, equivocal, or questionable sense? And may we not think, that if *so transcendently dreadful a doctrine had been meant to be stamped as in burning characters on our faith*, there would have been such forms of proposition, of circumlocution, if necessary, as would have rendered all doubt or question a mere palpable absurdity?

Some intelligent and devout inquirers, unable to admit the terrific doctrine, and pressed by the strength of the Scripture language, have had recourse to a *literal* interpretation of the threatened destruction, the eternal death, as signifying *annihilation of existence*, after a more or less protracted penal infliction. Even this would be a prodigious relief; but it is an admission that the terms in question do mean something final, in an absolute sense. I have not directed much thought to this point;* the grand object of interest being a negation of the *perpetuity* of misery. I have not been anxious for any satisfaction beyond that; though certainly one would wish to indulge the hope, founded on the Divine attribute of infinite benevolence, that there will be a period somewhere in the endless futurity, when all God's sinning creatures will be restored by him to rectitude and happiness.

It often surprises me that the fearful doctrine sits, if I may so express it, so *easy* on the minds of the religious and benevolent believers of it. Surrounded immediately by the multitudes of

* Here Foster erred; for he should have "given much thought to the point of *annihilation*," and then he would not have given the preference to restoration. Rev. F. White, to whom this letter was written, gave much thought to this point, and decided in favor of annihilation.—J. BLAIR.

fellow mortals. and looking abroad on the present, and back on the past, state of the race, and regarding them, as to the immense majority, as subjects of so direful destination, how *can* they have any calm enjoyment of life? how can they be cordially cheerful? how can they escape the incessant haunting of dismal ideas, darkening the economy in which their lot is cast? I remember suggesting to one of them such an image as this:—Suppose the case that so many of the great surrounding population as he could not, even in a judgment of charity, believe to be Christians, that is, to be in a safe state hereafter,—suppose the case that he knew so many were all doomed to suffer, by penal infliction, a death by torture, in the most protracted agony, with what feelings would he look on the populous city, the swarming country, or even a crowded, mixed congregation? *But what an infinitesimal trifle that would be in comparison with what he does believe in looking on these multitudes.* How, then, can they bear the sight of the living world around them?

As to religious teachers, if the tremendous doctrine be true, surely it ought to be almost continually proclaimed as with the blast of a trumpet, inculcated and reiterated, with ardent passion, in every possible form of terrible illustration; no remission of the alarm to thoughtless spirits. What! believe them in such inconceivably dreadful peril, and not multiply and aggravate the terrors to frighten them out of their stupor; deploring still, that all the horrifying representations in the power of thought and language to make are immeasurably below the real urgency of the subject; and almost wishing that some appalling phenomenon of sight or sound might break in to make the impression that no words can make! If we saw a fellow mortal stepping heedlessly or daringly on the utmost verge of some dreadful precipice or gulf, a humane spectator would raise and *continue* a shout, a scream to prevent him. How, then, can it comport with the duty of preachers to satisfy themselves with brief, occasional references to this awful topic, when the most prolonged, thundering alarm is but as the note of an infant, a bird, or an insect, in proportion to the horrible urgency of the case?

A number (not large, but of *great piety and intelligence*), of ministers within my acquaintance, several now dead, have been disbelievers of the doctrine in question; but at the same time not feeling themselves called upon to make a public disavowal; content themselves with employing in their ministrations strong general terms in denouncing the doom of impenitent sinners. For one thing, a consideration of the unreasonable imputations and unmeasured suspicions apt to be cast on any publicly declared partial defection from rigid Orthodoxy, has made them think they should better consult their usefulness by not giving a prominence to this dissentient point; while yet they make no concealment of it in private communications, and in answer to serious inquiries. When, besides, they could not be unaware of the grievous truth of what is so strongly insisted on as an argument by the defenders of the tenet,*—that thoughtless and wicked men would

* This sentiment is seen, by experience, to be true, where restoration is preached, but not so where *literal destruction* is proclaimed and proved—as it can be. This has *error*, and the cause is, the impenitent see much more *reason* and *Bible* for it than for either eternal woe, or universal salvation.

be sure to seize on the mitigated doctrine to encourage themselves in their impenitence. But this is only the same perverse and fatal use that they make of the doctrine of grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. If they *will* so abuse the truth, we can not help it. But methinks even this fact tells against the doctrine in question. If the very nature of man, as created, every individual, by the sovereign Power, be in such desperate disorder, that there is no possibility of conversion and salvation, except in the instances where the Power interposes with a special and redeeming efficacy, how can we conceive that the main proportion of the race thus morally impotent (that is, really and absolutely impotent,) will be eternally punished for the inevitable result of this moral impotence? But this I have said before.

NOTE.—The 200 texts for *destruction*, referred to in note on page first, are such as the following: *Die and death*, 50 texts; see, as a sample, Ez. 18: 20; Rom. 6: 23; *Be destroyed*, 40 texts, Ps. 92: 7, 2 Pet. 2: 12; *Perish*, 30 texts, 2 Pet. 2: 12; *Perdition*, 6 texts, 2 Pet. 3: 7; *Be consumed*, 6 texts, Ps. 37: 20; *Be devoured*, 2 texts, Heb. 10: 27; *Be slain*, 8 texts, Luke 19: 27; *Be blotted out*, 4 texts, Ps. 69: 28; Rev. 3: 5; *Be hewn down*, twice, Matt. 3: 10; *Lose life*, 8 texts, John 12: 25; 3: 36; *Come to an end*, 5 texts, Heb. 6: 8; *Not be*, 5 texts, Ps. 37: 10; Oba. 16; *Be cut off*, 5 texts, Ps. 37: 9; *Ground to powder*, 2 texts, Luke 20: 18; *Be torn in pieces*, Ps. 50: 22; *Be as nothing*, 3 texts, Isa. 41: 11, 12; *Burned, and burned up*, 9 texts, Mal. 4: 1; Matt. 3: 12. But it is a sad fact that our divines make *death* mean *life* in misery; *life* to mean happiness; *to lose life* is to have existence in woe; *to burn up* means to make a living salamander; *to destroy* is to preserve whole; *to devour, perish, consume, &c.*, means to make *indestructible, and immortal*—*not to be, to be without end*!

All the two hundred texts are quoted in my work, *DEATH NOT LIFE*; also, all for endless woe, which are all proved to be figurative, symbolic, or in parables; so no plain text for the doctrine exists. It came from the heathen, and is now making infidels and atheists, as well as universalists, and is a horrible slander of our God.

The wicked are never said to be *immortal* in the Bible, but just the reverse. See Job 4: 17; Rom. 2: 7; 1 Tim. 6: 16. The texts for *destruction* overwhelm both those for misery and for restoration. There is no immortality out of Christ. He is now the only "Tree of Life." The creeds, as to punishment, teach Satan's doctrine—"Thou shalt not surely die." Divines in the nineteenth century do not know the meaning of *death*; a false education has thrown a "vail" over their minds.

The doctrine of *destruction* has only been examined partially, except by a few in past ages, who found it true, and about two hundred ministers, and some thousands of members, who have of late adopted it in the United States and England. It must yet become the doctrine of the churches, or they go into universalism, which the greater mass of the impenitent now believe, while multitudes are skeptical or infidel—eternal torment has driven them there, and they can only be reclaimed by teaching them a more reasonable, and yet a Bible penalty.—J. BLAIN.